



THE RHODESIAN JOURNAL OF ECONOMICS

The Quarterly Journal of the Rhodesian Economic Society

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AFRICAN PARTICIPATION IN THE RHODESIAN ECONOMY

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**The Rhodesian Economics Journal is published by the Rhodesian Economic Society,
P.O. Box M.P. 167, Mount Pleasant, Salisbury, and printed by Sebri Printers,
Martin Drive, Msasa, Salisbury.**

EDUCATION FOR PARTICIPATION

By J. D. CAMERON*

The title that has been chosen for this Symposium, "African Participation in the Rhodesian economy", is certainly topical. All of us are well aware, of course, that Africans do, in fact, play a major part in our economic life. In 1973, there were almost 900 000 of them in employment, earning nearly \$320 million; buying power that stimulated economic activity very considerably.

In some respects, the Rhodesia of today resembles the United States of America of something over a century ago. Like the United States of that time, we, today, have the majority of our people subsisting in the rural areas, while the industrial base of our economy is still relatively small.

It is evident that the organisers of this Symposium believe that education is one of the many factors that will change this picture and promote necessary economic growth, and they have assigned this particular subject to me. I must make it clear that I am no educationalist and have no expertise whatsoever in this respect. I would certainly concede, however, that education and occupational training must have a most profound effect upon the momentum of economic advance.

Concern over two separate but related factors — the shortage of skilled manpower that exists in many occupations, and the large increase in the number of adolescents coming on to the labour market — focuses attention upon the education and occupational training of youth, not only here in Rhodesia, but in both the developed and developing countries of the World.

Here it should be stressed that disquiet over the supply of skilled manpower is not something new. The decision, in 1953, to establish this University was an indication of forward thinking; in this case, in respect of the training of persons to the higher levels of skills. Study of the history and background of the introduction of the Apprenticeship Training and Skilled Manpower Development Authority in 1968, reveals the concern that was felt here in the years after World War II. The establishment of this Authority was a major step in improving the overall quality of industrial training and in increasing the number of persons receiving occupational training locally. In both cases, the impact has been felt by the African sector of the community, for very many Africans have passed through this University and very many have received, and are receiving, training through the Authority, to take their places in the motor, engineering and building industries.

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The explosive growth of the population of the developing areas and the slow rate of economic advance of many such countries, create situations where the elements necessary to bring about essential change — elements which are ever in short supply — must be husbanded and utilised to maximum national advantage. Among such elements are finance, educational resources and skilled manpower. All are relevant to the title of this paper, "Education for Participation", and, of course, to the theme of this symposium, for where there are limitations in the availability of such elements, which is the case in Rhodesia, it is important to consider the minimum objectives of education and to assess how we shape up in meeting them, particularly in respect of the African section of our population. For this purpose, I have drawn on a report by Mrs. Murphree of the University of Rhodesia, as well as a report published in the Republic of South Africa in 1963 by an independent private group, including amongst its members Professors Duminy, Birley and Gourlay and other eminent persons.

In her report, Mrs. Murphree comments:- "For many, if not most, of the developing countries, the cost of providing a full primary and secondary education for all is beyond the available resources; therefore, choice must be exercised. It is possible for a country to invest inefficiently in human resource development; to emphasise the wrong kinds of formal education; and to create a surplus of educated persons in certain fields. There is, thus, a need for balance in educational planning."

In its report, the South African panel stated that there are two minimum objectives of education in which the interests of the nation and those of the individual obviously coincide and which, therefore, provide non-controversial material for enquiry.

The first of these objectives is economic. The individual must, at least, be fit to earn a living according to the circumstances likely to arise in his life, whilst the State must, at least, have a supply of educated, skilled people, sufficient to keep the economy functioning satisfactorily.

From the economic point of view, the task of education systems is to ensure that at least enough people are educated to the minimum level required by each broad class of work, so that the economy will never suffer from a shortage of trained or easily trainable manpower. This involves both the adequacy of output of fully trained persons from universities, technical colleges and the like; and the adequacy of output from the schools, which must provide enough people, qualified to enter universities and other institutions of after-school education, or to be trained within industry as clerical or skilled industrial workers.

The authors of this report were careful to point out that the building up of a sufficiently skilled or readily trainable labour force takes a number of years and requires planning well in advance of actual needs: and futher,

that changes in the types of industrial operations will increase the importance of the mobility of labour and, consequently, of flexibility within educational systems.

The panel's second minimum objective was the promotion of a degree of social adjustment, sufficient for the development of qualities such as honesty, diligence and co-operativeness, which are essential both to the building up of individual character and to the advancement of the community as a whole.

The report drew attention to the greatly increased sense of insecurity to be found in many modern societies, which had contributed to an unprecedented rate of change, an unprecedented complexity in the personal life of the individual, and an unprecedented amount of freedom for the individual. This led the authors to examine the causes of insecurity and to make suggestions for the improvement of syllabuses and teaching methods, aimed at leading young people to understand the nature of change and to become reconciled to its effects, guiding them through the new complexities and helping them to make the best use of the increased freedom that modern life opens up to them.

In this context, it was necessary to deal with the question of whether the amount of education to be given to an individual should extend to the limits of his capacity to absorb it, or whether the amount should be restricted by the probabilities of his being able to employ the education received to economic advantage, bearing in mind his background and, in particular, his racial grouping. It was the panel's belief that the interests of the State and the individual alike require the most rapid expansion of education, at all levels, that human and material resources permit.

A supplementary report, issued in 1966, concentrated on the economic aspects of education and re-affirmed the opinion that, if economic growth, so crucially important from every social point of view, was to be maintained, there must be immediate adjustments in educational systems to produce enough skilled scientists, technologists and technicians to ensure continued expansion.

It must be remembered that this panel dealt with the situation in the Republic of South Africa and, through various projections, examined the numbers that would be required in the different classes of labour in the years ahead, and estimated the possibility of these requirements being met from different sources. The panel reached the conclusion that, in the light of all the facts, it had no hesitation in declaring that further economic growth would be quite impossible without a constant shifting of the boundaries between the work done by Whites and by non-Whites, and averred that, in the future, the rate of change would be a good deal more rapid than in the past.

The findings of the panel have proved to be very much to the point and have been shown to be accurate. They are as true for this country as for

South Africa. All will agree with the panel's contention that, to compete successfully in the modern World, the State cannot afford to drop too far behind in the provision of education and occupational training, even though other countries may well be a great deal wealthier.

The foregoing and the minima established by the South African panel provide a suitable background against which to consider the subject "Education for Participation". Does our education system meet Mrs. Murphree's point and has it ensured that at least enough people are educated to the minimum level required by each broad class of work, so that the economy will never suffer from a shortage of trained or easily trainable manpower?

Perhaps, initially, it is necessary to consider how Rhodesia obtained the skills that enabled the country to reach its relatively advanced state in so short a period, and to ascertain whether these factors have changed, demanding, possibly, a new, more positive approach to the question of the supply of skilled manpower.

Of necessity, in the first few years of its history, Rhodesia obtained all its skilled personnel from external sources. The white population, as it developed, was of very high calibre and demanded good educational facilities for the growing number of children, with the result that education came to be organised on very sound lines, acknowledged to be of the highest standard. The high standard of education has been maintained and, today, is offered to all races in Rhodesia. This is not to say that there are no differences, but I refer, of course, to the standards.

The early establishment of primary and secondary education resulted in the children of the imported skilled work force being prepared locally for further training and, in fact, receiving some occupational training within the country. At higher levels, adolescents proceeded beyond the borders for training at universities, etc., in South Africa and even further afield. In more recent years, progress resulted in the establishment of technical colleges and, finally, the University of Rhodesia, so that greater numbers of top level personnel are now trained here.

Overall, the high standards of education have played no small part in the evolution of an above-average skilled work force, leading, in turn, to the social and economic developments that have helped to advance Rhodesia so much more rapidly than many other better-endowed countries. For obvious reasons, however, it was impossible to meet all our requirements from local sources and, thus, reliance on immigration continued to be necessary.

Like so many other developing countries, we now find that it is increasingly difficult to import skills. We know, too, that it is impossible so to direct human beings as to prevent them changing jobs or moving to other countries. Thus, we are faced with wastages — serious wastages — that are limiting our rate of progress. Can these be avoided? It is doubtful, for even under

the most ideal economic and social conditions, the advanced countries exert a tremendous magnetism, attracting the young in particular. Investigations by international bodies over a number of years reveal that the outflow of skills from developing to industrialised countries has reached such proportions as to present threats, not only to economic advancement, but even to health and educational services.

These factors then — the changing pattern of immigration, and the brain drain — must be taken into account when assessing the changes that make it imperative that we now look to our own resources and train our own people in ever-increasing numbers. The brain particularly, affects valuable teaching personnel at all levels, from university downwards, thereby adding to the difficulties of ensuring the training of adequate numbers of the wide variety of skilled persons necessary for continued economic and social progress.

It is safe to say that the educational system is only now approaching the stage where enough people are educated to the minimum levels necessary for the occupational training required by each broad class of work. We are still a very long way from being in a position to foresee a time when we will have an adequate supply of trained, skilled, manpower.

Have we, then, in the words of Mrs. Murphree, invested inefficiently in human resource development and emphasised the wrong kinds of formal education? In some respects, this might seem to be the case. The Commission of Inquiry into Further Education, for example, drew attention to evidence that too little use is made of African labour potential, recording that statistical evidence indicates that the educational attainments of African apprentices are generally significantly higher than those of their European counterparts or the prescribed minimum entry level. This was attributed to lack of employment opportunities generally for Africans, leading to educationally well-qualified Africans seeking jobs or training requiring only minimal academic qualifications.

This might point to inefficient and expensive investment in human resource development and should be a matter of concern when it is realised that such apprentices obviously come from the upper three forms of African secondary schools — the cream of the crop — representing, in total, less than one percent of all African school enrollment.

The Commission examined African labour potential and found that evidence pointed to Africans, in the main, being well-suited to work in many of the trades, ending its observations by saying that it was firmly of the opinion that employers must look to the African sector to supply increasing numbers of school leavers for training in the commercial, industrial and mining fields.

To return, then, to the title of this paper, "Education for Participation," let us pose two questions. Firstly, to what extent can it be said that our education system is properly geared to ensure that the African population participates to the full in our virile economy? Secondly, have we the necessary balance in our educational planning? As I remarked earlier, the fact that Africans drawn from the top forms are being indentured for training requiring low academic qualifications, might be taken to indicate an imbalance and too great an outturn at the top end of secondary education.

The truth is, however, that for over-long, employers in almost all walks of life, not excluding the State, have dragged their feet and have not made full use of the trainable manpower available, placing too great a reliance on the importation of skills.

Too little attention has been focused on the need for facilities for our skilled manpower needs, with the result that these are under considerable strain at present. It has been announced recently that an additional technical college is to be built to relieve some of this pressure, indicating that greater attention is now being concentrated on this important area of education.

Earlier, I highlighted the points made by Mrs. Murphree and the South African panel of professors. I have indicated that we are just as aware of the factors mentioned as was South Africa. Despite some obvious shortcomings in aspects of our educational training, Rhodesia has always accepted that the interests of the State and the individual alike, require the most rapid expansion of education, at all levels, that human and material resources permit: in fact, in respect of formal education, we have always shown up well and, in the case of our African population, probably better than any other country on this Continent.

This is not to infer that we do not urgently need additional further education facilities. We do, in fact, for due to past over-reliance on externally trained skills and the sharp fall off in immigration, the position is worsening rapidly. We must never overlook the fact that our ability to narrow the gap between the supply and the availability of skills is limited, however, by the difficulties that, inevitably, are experienced in provision of the practical element so essential in the training of a skilled work force.

Progressively, greater and greater African participation in the economy will occur, particularly as employers come to recognise the merit of training our own people rather than looking to external sources for skills.

Progressively, too, as this occurs and Africans gain in practical experience, so will they demand more say in management and control and, inevitably, we must see a situation where, to a greater and greater extent, they assume the direction of labour and other aspects of management.

In this regard, it is interesting to note that, in the period from 1957 to 1974, African graduates and holders of diplomas, certificates and higher degrees from this University totalled 956. From the Faculty of Arts there were 368, of whom 285 obtained B.A. General degrees, 78 B.A. Honours degrees, and 5 higher qualifications up to Ph.D. From the Faculty of Education there were 335, of whom 3 obtained Ph.D.

39 obtained medical degrees from the Faculty of Medicine, whilst from the Faculty of Science there were 92, of whom one obtained Ph.D.

Finally, from the Faculty of Social Studies there were 122, of whom 73 obtained qualifications in Economics, 20 in Law and 16 diplomas in Public Administration.

This is only the beginning. The pace is changing fast. What is necessary — in fact essential — is recognition of the legitimate aspirations of trained Africans for a place in the sun.

In the early part of this paper, I drew attention to the panel's second minimum objective, the promotion of a degree of social adjustment sufficient for the development of qualities such as honesty, diligence and co-operative-ness, so essential to the building up of individual character and to the advance of the community as a whole. Education and training do not have economic effects only, for the goals of all societies are also social, cultural and political and many of those trained will not, in fact, find their mark in the economic sectors. Nevertheless, such persons are of importance to society.

It has been said on many occasions that countries will continue to be under-developed so long as their people are under-developed, having had limited opportunities to expand to the full potential of their capabilities in the service of society. Basically, all progress comes about as a result of the efforts of people.

“Education for Participation” means participation in all aspects of life.



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